

## The Iowans at Fort Donelson

Edwin C. Bearss

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

---

### Recommended Citation

Bearss, Edwin C. "The Iowans at Fort Donelson." *The Annals of Iowa* 36 (1962), 241-268.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.7626>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

# Annals of Iowa

ESTABLISHED 1863

VOL. XXXVI, No.4

DES MOINES, SPRING, 1962

THIRD SERIES

---

## The Iowans at Fort Donelson

General C. F. Smith's Attack on the Confederate Right  
February 12-16, 1862

by EDWIN C. BEARSS

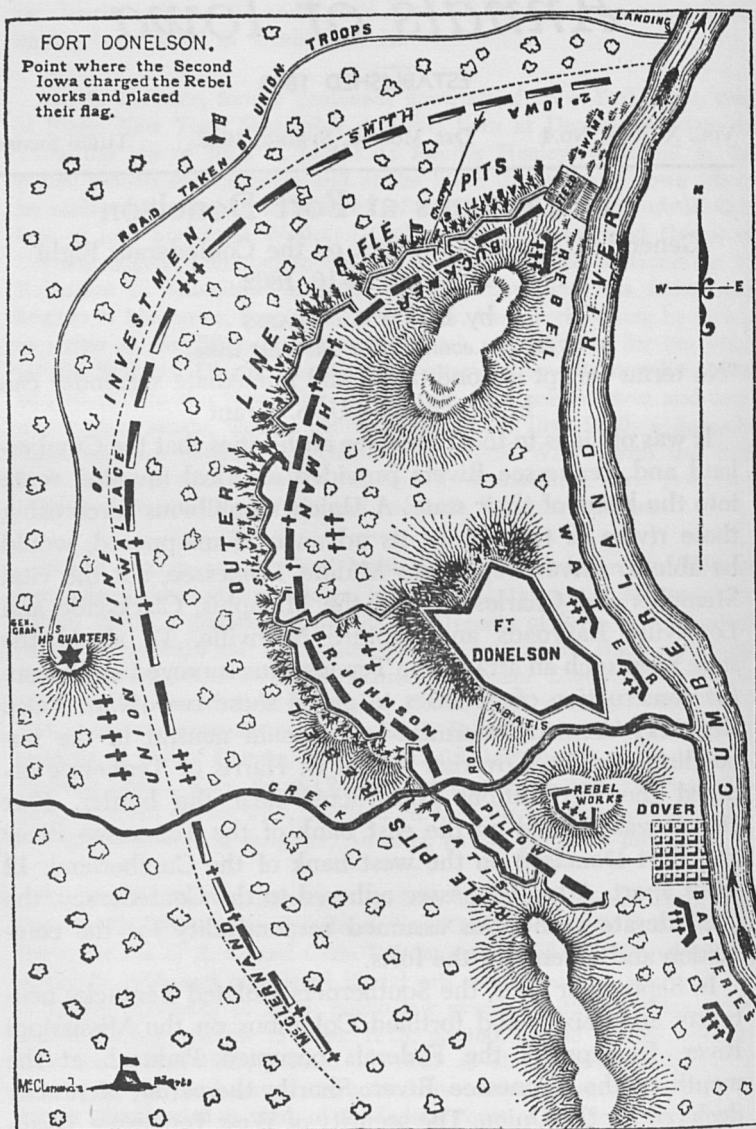
*(To be continued in the next issue)*

"No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted."—U. S. Grant

It was obvious to the Tennessee authorities that the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers provided an ideal invasion route into the heart of their state. A Union amphibious force using these rivers as the axis of its advance, if unopposed, would be able to drive deeply into Middle Tennessee, cut the vital Memphis and Charleston, and the Memphis, Clarksville and Louisville Railroads and capture Nashville. To shield the state from such an attack, the Tennesseans surveyed and began the construction of defenses to guard these two rivers. Since Kentucky seemed determined to remain neutral in the impending conflict, Governor Isham G. Harris of Tennessee ordered the fortifications constructed near the border. Fort Henry was located on the east bank of the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the west bank of the Cumberland, 12 miles apart. After Tennessee adhered to the Confederacy, the Confederate authorities assumed responsibility for the completion and defense of the forts.

In September 1861, the Southerners violated Kentucky neutrality and seized and fortified Columbus on the Mississippi River. In reprisal, the Federals occupied Paducah at the mouth of the Tennessee River. Shortly thereafter, Kentucky declared for the Union. The security of West Tennessee, Nashville, and the vital railroads now depended on the Confederates' ability to hold Forts Henry and Donelson.

Examining their maps, the Federal leaders could see the tre-



### FORT DONELSON

Point where the Second Iowa charged the Rebel works and placed their flag. Reprint: *Iowa in Wartimes*, Byers, 1888

mendous advantages to the Union if they could capture the forts. Besides opening Middle Tennessee to invasion, the fall of the forts would compel the strong Confederate forces at Columbus and Bowling Green, Kentucky, to fall back to avoid being encircled. With the loss of these key posts, the Confederate defense line in the West would be hopelessly shattered. The Southerners would have to withdraw into north Alabama and Mississippi.

At the beginning of February, 1862, a Union amphibious force started up the Tennessee River en route to Fort Henry. The 15,000 bluecoated soldiers were led by Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant; the four ironclad and three timber-clad gunboats were commanded by Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote. Several miles below Fort Henry, the transports stopped and the troops disembarked. Brigadier General John A. McClelland's division was landed on the east side of the river, and Brigadier General Charles F. Smith's on the west bank. Grant scheduled the attack for the 6th.

According to Grant and Foote's plan of operations, the four ironclads, supported by the three timber-clads, were to attack Fort Henry, while McClelland's infantry moved against the land approaches to the fort. C. F. Smith's column was to occupy Fort Heiman on the opposite side of the river.

When the Federals advanced against Fort Henry, it was garrisoned by about 3,000 Confederates commanded by Colonel Adolphus Heiman, but the fort had not been properly located. The Tennessee River was flooding and Fort Henry was threatened with inundation. When Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman visited the fort, he decided it would be impossible to defend and ordered it evacuated. To cover the retreat of the garrison to Fort Donelson, Tilghman decided to fight a holding action. Accompanied by the cannoneers of Taylor's Tennessee Battery, Tilghman took up his battle station in Fort Henry.

About noon, the Union gunboats started bombarding the fort. The Confederate artillerists returned the bluejackets' fire. Within 75 minutes, the Union warships were able to dismount most of the Southerners' guns. In return, the Confederates disabled one of the ironclads, the *Essex*, and heavily damaged another, the *Cincinnati*. Having accomplished his



mission of delaying the Federals long enough to allow Heiman's command to make its escape, Tilghman ordered the fort surrendered. Several hours after the Confederates had lowered the flag, the Union infantry reached the fort.

With Fort Henry in his possession, Grant prepared to "take and destroy Fort Donelson on the 8th." If the general were to have adequate naval support in this operation, several of the damaged ironclads would have to be replaced. Grant had to postpone his attack, while Flag Officer Foote returned to Cairo, Illinois, to obtain additional vessels. Consequently, it was the afternoon of the 11th before preparations were completed. McClelland's division started for Fort Donelson immediately; C. F. Smith's command marched on the following morning.

In the meantime, General Albert S. Johnston, the Confederate commander in the West, had thrown thousands of reinforcements into the Fort Donelson perimeter. By the morning of the 13th, there were over 18,000 Southern soldiers in the area. Brigadier General John B. Floyd assumed command of the Fort Donelson Confederates at that time.

On the previous day, Grant's army, 17,000 strong, had arrived in front of the Confederate perimeter. Except for the slashing attacks on McClelland's vanguard by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan B. Forrest's cavalry, the bluecoats encountered no opposition as they took position in front of the Confederate works. During the day, one of Foote's ironclads, the *Carondelet*, reached Fort Donelson. To signal her arrival, the *Carondelet* fired a few rounds into the Water Batteries. The Confederate gunners did not reply.

Grant's army sought to complete its investment of the Fort Donelson perimeter on the 13th. Troops from McClelland's and Smith's commands launched limited attacks on different sectors of the Confederate lines. On the Union left, the 2d Kentucky easily turned back Smith's thrust. McClelland's assault on the Confederate center was repulsed by Colonel Heiman's brigade. These setbacks, in conjunction with reports indicating that the Southerners had at least as many troops as he had, caused Grant to hesitate. He would await the arrival of reinforcements and the rest of Foote's ironclads before completing the investment of the Confederate stronghold.

The *Carondelet* attacked the Water Batteries a second time on the 13th. This time, the Confederate cannoneers returned the gunboat's fire. Before the ironclad broke off the engagement and dropped down river, both sides had suffered casualties and damage.

Late in the afternoon, the wind changed and it began to rain and turn cold. For several days it had been unseasonably warm. Many of the soldiers had discarded their overcoats and warm clothing. As the temperature continued to drop, the precipitation changed to sleet, then to snow. This rapid shift in the weather caused great suffering.

During the night, Flag Officer Foote reached the Fort Donelson area with three ironclads and two timber-clads. The warships had escorted a large convoy with thousands of reinforcements for Grant's army up the Cumberland River.

On the afternoon of the 14th, after the troops had disembarked, the gunboats prepared to attack the Water Batteries. Abreast, the four ironclads chugged slowly up the river. The two timber-clads followed the ironclads. Within a few minutes, the Union sailors and Confederate heavy artillerists were blazing away at each other. Foote's ironclads were able to close to within one-fourth mile of the death-dealing Water Batteries before their advance was checked. Registering repeated hits on the gunboats, which disabled three of the ironclads, the Confederates repulsed the naval attack.

Pending the repair of the gunboats and the arrival of additional troops, Grant determined to lay siege to Fort Donelson. General Floyd knew that if the garrison allowed Grant to carry out his plans, the Confederates would be compelled to surrender. He decided to have his army cut its way through the investing lines. At daybreak on the 15th, Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow's Confederate command launched a slashing attack on the Union right flank division led by General McClelland.

\* \* \*

At daybreak on February 15, when the Confederates launched their powerful onslaught on the Union right, five of the eight brigades constituting General Grant's investing army were operating west of Indian Creek. Detachments from four of these brigades occupied the line of outposts which the

Federal officers had established on the ridges paralleling the commanding ground occupied by the Rebels' rifle pits. The other brigade, Colonel Morgan L. Smith's, was held in reserve.

Until the early hours of the 15th, this sector of the Fort Donelson perimeter had been held by Brigadier General Simon B. Buckner's division. In accordance with the plan of operations adopted by the council of war, convened by General Floyd on the night of the 14th, it had been determined to use Buckner's troops to bolster General Pillow's attack on the Yankees' right. Before Buckner's men could leave the rifle pits which they had held for the past three days, it would be necessary to have troops from another unit relieve them. Colonel John W. Head's 30th Tennessee, which had been holding the Erin Hollow sector, would take the place of Buckner's command. Following the departure of Buckner's troops, the three-quarters of a mile of rifle pits west of Indian Creek, formerly held by 3,600 soldiers, would be occupied by approximately 450 officers and men. The Rebel brass felt justified in taking this calculated risk. It was the Rebel generals' considered opinion that the Yankees would be so hard-pressed devising measures to cope with Pillow's assault, they would be unable to capitalize on this situation.<sup>1</sup>

When the orders to report to General Buckner reached the command post of the 30th Tennessee about 2 a.m., both Colonel Head and Lieutenant Colonel R. H. Murphy were absent. The two colonels, quite ill, were spending the night at the fort. On perusing the dispatch, the ranking officer present, Major James J. Turner, sent a runner to the fort to acquaint Colonel Head with the situation. Pending Head's appearance, the major directed his subordinates to rouse their commands. This proved to be difficult, the major recalled, "as many men had scarcely slept for three days and nights, and had lain in the trenches for two days and nights in the mud, rain, sleet, and snow, without fire or adequate clothing to protect them from such exposure." Considerable time was lost in forming and mustering the troops. Once the men had fallen in, the regiment moved out. As a result of the icy condition of

<sup>1</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. VII, 331. (Cited hereafter as O. R.)

the road, the march was greatly retarded. Dawn was approaching before the men of the 30th Tennessee filed into the trenches. Immediately following the Tennessees' appearance, Buckner's troops, who had been standing by for a considerable time anxiously awaiting their arrival, hit the road.<sup>2</sup>

Before departing for the Confederate left, Buckner called for Colonel Head. (The colonel, upon receiving Turner's message, had rejoined his command.) Buckner informed Head that his regiment was to occupy the rifle pits formerly held by his division, and, "if attacked and overpowered, to fall back into the fort."

In an effort to accomplish this difficult assignment, Head divided his command. Major Turner, accompanied by Captains J. L. Carson's, T. C. Martin's, and W. T. Sample's companies, was charged with the defense of the detached rifle pits covering the Eddyville road formerly held by Colonel Roger W. Hanson's crack 2d Kentucky. The six other companies belonging to the regiment would hold the trenches previously occupied by the six regiments constituting Colonel John C. Brown's brigade. In deploying his detachment, Major Turner placed Carson's and Sample's units in the rifle pits; Martin's was held in reserve. To make matters worse, the three batteries (Jacksons', Graves', and Porter's) which had employed their 16 guns to assist Buckner's division in holding this sector of the Fort Donelson perimeter, had been withdrawn to support Pillow's attack on the Union right.<sup>3</sup>

At daybreak the Union sharpshooters, with their long-ranged rifle-muskets, opened fire on Colonel Head's greyclads. Being equipped with "short-range guns," the Tennessees found it unhealthy to expose themselves. They were forced to "keep well under cover or be picked off." Major Turner recalled, "A more cheerless day we never spent. It was cloudy and cold. For five hours we could hear the clash of arms on the east, and we expected the army to go out, leaving us to hold the fort and surrender."<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

The Union divisions commanded by Brigadier Generals

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 377; *Fort Henry and Fort Donelson Campaigns—February, 1862* (Fort Leavenworth, 1923), 673-674. (Cited hereafter as *Source Book*.)

<sup>3</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 377; *Source Book*, 674.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Charles F. Smith and Lewis Wallace spent the night of the 14th on the ridges and in the hollows west of Indian Creek. Wallace's division, which had been organized during the day, was posted on the right, Smith's on the left. Wallace's main line of resistance rested on the crest of a ridge overlooking the hollow which debouches into Indian Creek, about 250 yards southwest of the Poor house. It was on this ridge that a portion of General McClelland's division had camped on the night of the 12th. In Wallace's sector the higher ground was covered with scattered timber, while the slopes of the ridge were heavily wooded. Immediately to the rear of Wallace's position lay the road which served as the line of communication linking the wings of Grant's investing army. The valley of Indian Creek separated Wallace's right flank unit, Colonel Charles Cruft's brigade, from McClelland's left—which was held by Colonel William H. L. Wallace's troops. Besides being "within good supporting distance" of W. H. L. Wallace's troops, Cruft's outposts occupied positions "not more than 500 yards from" the Rebels' rifle pits. Wallace's other brigade led by Colonel John M. Thayer was posted on Cruft's left. Patrols from Thayer's unit were in contact on the left with pickets from General C. F. Smith's division. In fact Wallace, when he made a tour of inspection, discovered that his entire line was "within easy cannon-shot" of the Confederate works. As soon as he had deployed his division, Wallace received his instructions from General Grant. His orders were to hold his ground and prevent the Rebels from breaking through the investment line in the Indian Creek sector.<sup>5</sup>

Upon the advent of darkness on the 14th, Wallace had his subordinates establish and man a strong line of outposts. The remainder of the troops were permitted to retire from the crest of the ridge. When they reached the hollows behind the ridge,

<sup>5</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 236-237. The following units comprised Cruft's brigade: the 31st and 44th Indiana, the 17th and 24th Kentucky. Thayer's brigade was composed of: the 1st Nebraska, the 58th, 68th and 76th Ohio. Thayer's and Cruft's brigades had reached the Fort Donelson area, by boat, on the night of February 13. The troops were disembarked the next morning at the landing, four miles below Fort Donelson. After a hard, circuitous march the bluecoats gained the upper reaches of Hickman Creek. Before moving into position at the front, Cruft's and Thayer's brigades were organized into a division commanded by General Wallace.



the soldiers were allowed to build camp fires. After eating their evening meal, Wallace reported, his men "laid down as best they could on beds of ice and snow, a strong, cold wind making conditions still more disagreeable."

During the night, the quiet was shattered on several occasions when the Confederate cannoneers dropped shells into Wallace's sector. This harassing fire proved to be very disconcerting to Thayer's troops, a large portion of whom were getting their first taste of combat.<sup>6</sup>

On Wallace's left, General Smith's division continued to occupy the ridge parallel to the one held by the Confederates. The Ridge road served as the boundary between Smith's right and Wallace's left. With the approach of darkness, General Smith directed Colonels John Cook and Jacob G. Lauman, the officers in charge of his two advance brigades, to detail strong detachments to hold their main line of resistance. (Lauman hailed from Burlington, Iowa.) The remainder of the troops could be recalled in case of an emergency. Except for the soldiers assigned to outpost duty, Cook's and Lauman's men were to be permitted to obtain rest and refreshments as circumstances allowed.<sup>7</sup>

Colonel Cook's picket line on Smith's right was held by picked companies from the 50th Illinois, the 52d Indiana, and the 12th Iowa, supported by the 13th Missouri.<sup>8</sup> These troops, being in proximity to the foe were denied the use of camp fires. It snowed again on the night of the 14th and the troops, especially those on outpost duty, spent another terrible night exposed to the hostile elements. Colonel Crafts J. Wright, the commander of the 13th Missouri reported:

We remained in this position [on the ridge opposite the Confederate rifle pits] without fires during the storm of rain

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 221; O. R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 8, 10.

<sup>8</sup> The ten companies which were destined to constitute the 12th Iowa Infantry were ordered to report to Camp Union by Governor Samuel Kirkwood in the period from September 14 to October 10, 1861. By November 25, the last of the companies had been mustered into Federal service at Dubuque by Captain Edward C. Washington.

On November 28, Thanksgiving Day, the regiment, having left Camp Union two days before, was ferried across the Mississippi River and boarded the waiting cars of the Illinois Central at Dunlieth, Illinois. Detraining at East St. Louis on the 30th, the Iowans recrossed the Mississippi and marched to Benton Barracks. The 12th Iowa remained at Benton Barracks until January 27, 1862. While at the huge camp of



... [sleet], and snow. The clothes of the men were drenched and frozen upon them. I sat upon a log wrapped in my blanket until 3 o'clock, when permission was given to go back half a mile and build fires to dry the men.

It appears that Colonel Wright was mistaken, because Colonel Cook hadn't sanctioned the 13th Missouri's retirement. When advised of Colonel Wright's move, Cook was shocked by the regimental commander's flagrant violation of orders. Without bothering to procure his horse, Cook proceeded on foot to where Wright's Missourians were huddled around the newly kindled fires. Hailing the unfortunate Wright, Cook ordered the Missourian to get his troops back to their original position. By the time the regiment returned to the front it was 8 a.m. Fortunately for the bluecoats, the Confederates had been busy regrouping their forces preparatory to the attempt to break out of Fort Donelson. Consequently, no attack was made on Cook's weakened line of outposts during the absence of the 13th Missouri.<sup>9</sup>

Like Colonel Cook, Lauman had called upon his regimental commanders to detail certain companies to hold his advance position. After these units had occupied the line of outposts, Lauman withdrew the remainder of his troops from the wind-

---

instructions, the soldiers were "instructed in company and battalion drill and the other duties of the soldier, in order that they might be prepared to take the field against the enemy at the earliest possible date."

After being ferried across the Mississippi to East St. Louis, the regiment again clambered aboard railroad cars. By the next afternoon the troops were on the Cairo wharf. Here, orders were handed to Colonel Joseph J. Woods to take his regiment to Smithfield, Kentucky. The Iowans were transported to Smithfield on the steamer *City of Memphis*. Landing at Smithfield on the 30th, the regiment remained encamped there until February 5. At an early hour on the 5th, the Iowans struck tents and boarded a steamboat. Arriving off Paducah, the boat with the 12th Iowa aboard, rendezvoused with a large convoy. Here, the regiment was assigned to the brigade commanded by Colonel Cook. Before the Iowans had an opportunity to get acquainted with their new command, the convoy cast off and started up the Tennessee River. It was after daybreak on the 6th, when the transports pulled into the east bank of the river at Bailey's Landing, four miles north of Fort Henry. Quickly disembarking, the Iowans moved forward to join in the attack on the Confederate fort. Owing to the terrible condition of the road, the footsoldiers did not arrive until after Flag Officer Foote's gunboats had compelled the fort to surrender.

*Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion, Together with Historical Sketches of Volunteer Organizations 1861-1866*, II (Des Moines, 1908), 407; David W. Reed, *Campaigns and Battles of the Twelfth Regiment Iowa Veteran Volunteer Infantry* (Evanston, 1903), 3-15.

<sup>9</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 221, 223-224.

swept ridge. Once the lucky individuals of Cook's and Lauman's brigades, who had escaped the disagreeable duty on the picket line, reached the shelter afforded by the hollows overlooking Hickman Creek, they built fires. Gathering around the cheerful flames, the troops heated their coffee, cooked their rations, and dried their clothes. These basic needs taken care of, the soldiers threw themselves on the snow-covered ground to get a few hours' rest.<sup>10</sup>

General C. F. Smith's third brigade, Lew Wallace's, had left Fort Henry early on the morning of the 14th. By the time Wallace's brigade arrived at Mrs. Crisp's log cabin, where Grant maintained his headquarters, Cruft's and Thayer's troops had reached the Hickman Creek staging area. General Grant accordingly drafted an order constituting a division composed of Cruft's and Thayer's command. Wallace was placed in charge of the newly organized division. The ranking colonel, Morgan L. Smith, assumed command of Wallace's former brigade following the reorganization.<sup>11</sup>

Upon being elevated to a brigade command, Colonel M. L. Smith reported to General C. F. Smith. The general, taking cognizance of the late hour and the limited space available, decided to hold Smith's brigade in reserve for the time being. M. L. Smith's troops were to bivouac for the night on either side of the Ridge road, several hundred yards east of Mrs. Crisp's cabin.<sup>12</sup>

On the 14th, Lauman's brigade had been strengthened by the addition of one regiment. The transport, *McGill*, with the 2d Iowa aboard, had reached the Fort Donelson area at the same time as the convoy carrying Cruft's and Thayer's troops. Arriving at the Hickman Creek staging area about 11 a.m., the Hawkeyes were assigned to Lauman's brigade. When the commander of the 2d Iowa, Colonel James M. Tuttle, reported to Lauman, he was directed to form his regiment on the brigade's extreme left. Scaling the timber covered ridge, the

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 229; Reed, *Campaigns and Battles of the 12th Iowa*, 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Wallace, "The Capture of Fort Donelson," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 409. M. L. Smith's brigade was composed of: the 11th Indiana, the 8th Missouri, and Battery A, 1st Illinois Light Artillery.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Iowans took position to the left of the 25th Indiana, within sight of the Confederate rifle pits on the opposite ridge.<sup>13</sup>

Sergeant John A. Duckworth of Company G, 2d Iowa, wrote of the regiment's arrival before the Fort Donelson perimeter, "We landed on the south side of the Cumberland, four miles below Dover . . . It was very cold, having snowed the night before, and started immediately, in company with several other regiments, to make connection with the troops that had come up from Fort Henry, two days before."<sup>14</sup>

Private John T. Bell of Company C recalled, "we marched four miles over villainous roads and came to the Union forces investing the fort, stacking arms near General C. F. Smith's camp fire." While halted, Private Bell and many of the Iowans "saw General Grant for the first time as he rode up and held a conference with General Smith, then mounted the yellow horse we became so familiar with afterwards, and passed off to the extreme left of the line."<sup>15</sup>

The soldiers of the 2d Iowa long remembered the "cold and disagreeable night" of the 14th. Private Bell reported that at dark all the Iowans, except those detailed for outpost duty:

. . . were withdrawn to the rear where we built fires in a sheltered ravine and tried to make out supper with such materials as we had with us, though we were traveling light, with the exception of an extra weight in the way of cartridges. We had left our blankets on the boat, and as

<sup>13</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 229; V. P. Twombly, *The Second Iowa Infantry at Fort Donelson, February 15, 1862* (Des Moines, 1901), 14-15; John T. Bell, *Tramps & Triumphs of the Second Iowa Infantry* (Des Moines, 1961), 7-9. The 2d Iowa was organized and mustered into Federal service at Keokuk, Iowa, on May 27, 1861. On June 13, the regiment left the state for service in northern Missouri, where it was assigned the vital task of guarding the railroads of that area. Toward the end of the fourth week of July, the 2d Iowa was ordered to Bird's Point, Missouri. The regiment remained at Bird's Point until August 14, when the Hawkeyes were sent to Pilot Knob. From Pilot Knob (on the 27th), the unit was ordered to Jackson, Missouri, where it remained until September 8. From September 23 to October 2, the 2d Iowa was stationed at Fort Jefferson, Kentucky, and Bird's Point, Missouri. In the period between October 2-12, the unit participated in the Charleston expedition. Next, the 2d Iowa was transferred to St. Louis. The Hawkeyes remained at St. Louis until February 10, 1862, when they boarded the steamer *McGill*, preparatory to moving to Fort Henry. Reaching Fort Henry on the 11th, the Iowans were ordered to proceed to Fort Donelson by water.

<sup>14</sup> Twombly, *2d Iowa at Fort Donelson*, 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Bell, *Tramps and Triumphs*, 9.

we had no tents, suffered greatly with the cold during the night, the ground being covered with snow. As our rations consisted wholly of hard bread, some of us started off foraging early the next morning, and "raised" a few chickens and some pork, which we boiled in a pot "borrowed" of the people who furnished the provender.<sup>16</sup>

\* \* \*

Shortly after daybreak on the 15th, the full-throated roar of battle, from the northeast caused Lew Wallace to have the "long roll" beaten. As soon as they had mustered their units, the regimental commanders led them to the front. Arriving at the line of outposts, the officers quickly formed their men into line of battle. This accomplished, they covered their fronts with a strong line of skirmishers. Initially, Wallace believed McClelland was the attacker.<sup>17</sup>

The heavy firing (both artillery and small-arms), however, continued without let up. Finally, this served to raise doubts in Wallace's mind as to the correctness of his assumption as to the identity of the aggressor. One hour passed, then the better part of a second, Wallace commenced to wonder—"would it [the firing] never end." The suspense became exasperating. About 8 a.m., a solitary horseman galloped up to Wallace's command post. The newcomer was Major Mason Brayman, McClelland's assistant adjutant general.

Brayman excitedly informed Wallace that McClelland's division had been attacked and needed assistance. Continuing, Brayman reported the Confederates, under the cover of darkness, had massed their entire force against McClelland. At the moment, Brayman noted, the situation was critical, not only was the division having to give ground, but its ammunition had started to give out. In conclusion, Brayman stated that McClelland had told him, "No one can tell what will be the result if we don't get immediate help."<sup>18</sup>

McClelland's message thrust Wallace on the horns of a dilemma. If Wallace chose to be guided by Grant's instructions of the previous afternoon, "to hold . . . [his] position and prevent the enemy from escaping," his division would have to remain where it was. After explaining his orders to Brayman, Wallace called for one of his staff officers, Lieuten-

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 237.

<sup>18</sup> *Source Book*, 977.

ant Addison Ware. The young lieutenant was directed to hasten to Grant's headquarters, acquaint the general with the situation, and request permission for Wallace's division to march to McClernand's assistance.<sup>19</sup>

Pounding up to Grant's headquarters on his sweat-lathered horse, Lieutenant Ware learned the general was absent. One of Grant's aides informed Ware the general had departed several hours before for the fleet anchorage, for the purpose of conferring with Flag Officer Foote. Furthermore, Ware was informed, nobody at headquarters felt he had the authority to authorize Wallace to go to McClernand's assistance. While Ware returned to Wallace's command post, one of Grant's staff officers, Captain William S. Hillyer, headed for the landing. Hillyer's mission was to advise the general of the critical turn of events.<sup>20</sup>

\* \* \*

About daybreak, a courier with a message from Flag Officer Foote had galloped up to Mrs. Crisp's house. Grant was handed a dispatch informing him the flag officer wished to see him. In his letter, Foote pointed out that his injury (The flag officer had been wounded during the navy's attack on the Water Batteries on the previous afternoon.) prevented his visiting the general. After directing his adjutant general, Captain John A. Rawlins, to notify each of the division commanders of his absence and "instruct them to do nothing to bring on an engagement until they received further orders," Grant rode off to confer with Foote. Either Captain Rawlins neglected to carry out Grant's instructions or the staff officer entrusted with their delivery failed to contact all the division commanders. Wallace was certainly not apprised of Grant's absence.

During the previous day, the road linking Union headquarters with the landing where the fleet was tied up had been churned into a ribbon of mud by the passage of the thousands of reinforcements. The intense cold on the night of the 14th had frozen the ground solid. Consequently, the general found the going difficult as he rode toward the river.

Reaching the landing, the general discovered Foote's flag-

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*; O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 175, 237.

<sup>20</sup> *Source Book*, 977; O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 237.



ship, the ironclad *St. Louis*, anchored out in midstream. A small boat was used to ferry the general out to the gunboat. Boarding the *St. Louis*, Grant learned from Foote that the ironclads had been badly battered in their attack on the Water Batteries. Foote suggested that Grant entrench his army, while he returned to Cairo with the two most badly damaged of the ironclads. The other two would be left below Fort Donelson, charged with protecting the transports. At Cairo, Foote, in addition to supervising the repair of the gunboats, would seek to hasten forward the ironclad *Benton* and the mortar boats. Foote expressed the opinion he could effect the necessary repairs and be back at Fort Donelson within ten days. A cursory glance convinced the general that it was mandatory to place several of the battered ironclads in drydock. Grant parted from the flag officer, believing he would be forced to resort to a siege, if he were to reduce the Confederate stronghold.

Just as Grant stepped ashore, he was greeted by a member of his staff, Captain Hillyer. The general immediately saw that the captain was livid with fear. Hillyer tersely informed Grant, that a powerful Rebel force had sallied from the left flank of the Fort Donelson perimeter and was rolling up the Union right. Putting the spurs to his horse, the general headed for the point of danger at a gallop.<sup>21</sup>

\* \* \*

Having failed to contact General Grant, Lieutenant Ware returned to Wallace's command post. After the lieutenant had informed Wallace that the members of Grant's staff had declined to accept the responsibility for ordering him to reinforce McClelland, Brayman retraced his steps. All this time, the roar of the battle seemed to be drawing nearer. This was a clear indication to Wallace that the tide continued to run against the Federals.<sup>22</sup>

Shortly after Brayman's departure, two staff officers thundered up to Wallace's headquarters. The older carried a second dispatch from McClelland. Subsequently, Wallace recalled that this officer, "a gray-haired man in uniform" address-

<sup>21</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, I (New York, 1885), 249-250; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellions*, Series I, Vol. 22, pp. 585-586. (Cited hereafter as O. R. N.)

<sup>22</sup> *Source Book*, 977; O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 237.



ed him "with tears in his eyes," as he described the situation on the Union right. After advising Wallace that the Rebels had turned McClelland's right flank, the elderly gentleman exclaimed, "The regiments are being crowded back on the center. We are using ammunition taken from the dead and wounded. The whole army is in danger."<sup>23</sup>

Wallace's initial impulse had been to send reinforcements when he had been hailed by Major Brayman. But he had hesitated in the face of Grant's injunction, "to hold his position." Now, Wallace's first impulse was "seconded by judgment." Wallace knew that if McClelland's division were rolled back on his command, a general panic might ensue. "In the absence of the commanding general," Wallace reasoned, "the responsibility was . . . [his]." Like a good officer, Wallace decided to hold his previous order in abeyance. He would march to the sound of the guns. Wallace knew that one regiment would not be enough to cope with the crisis. He would send a brigade. Turning to the grizzled-haired officer, Wallace remarked, "Tell General McClelland that I will send him my first brigade with Colonel Cruft." Pointing to the officer's companion, Wallace added, "I will retain this gentleman to serve as guide."<sup>24</sup>

Having made this important decision, Wallace hastened to Cruft's command post. The general, after tersely briefly his subordinate on the critical turn of events, ordered Cruft, "to put . . . [his] brigade in rapid motion to the extreme right of our line, for the purpose of re-enforcing General McClelland's division." As the two officers parted, Cruft glanced at his watch—the time was 8:30 a.m.<sup>25</sup>

Immediately following the receipt of his marching orders, the able Cruft sprang into action. Without bothering to recall his skirmishers, Cruft quickly assembled his brigade. Leaving their blankets, knapsacks, and great-coats behind, Cruft's troops, guided by McClelland's young staff officer, moved off in column of companies through the woods. Gaining the Pinery

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, It is impossible to identify the grey-haired staff officer. Wallace in his autobiography notes that he was a colonel. An examination of the roster of McClelland's staff, however, reveals that Major Brayman was the ranking officer. In his "After Action Report" McClelland fails to identify the officer entrusted with this second message.

<sup>24</sup> *Source Book*, 977-978.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 243.

road, Cruft's bluecoats turned into a little used country lane. This road ascended the eastern slope of the Indian Creek valley and gave ready access to the Wynn's Ferry road.<sup>26</sup>

The departure of Cruft's command left Wallace with only one brigade—Thayer's. This brigade continued to hold the ridge overlooking the hollow which debouches into Indian Creek about 250 yards southwest of the Poor house. Skirmishers from Thayer's brigade and those left behind by Cruft occupied the ravine in front of Wallace's main line of resistance. Some time after the departure of Cruft's brigade, Wallace was joined by Grant's adjutant, Captain Rawlins. Wallace succinctly briefed Rawlins on the contents of McClelland's two messages, and told of the dispatch of Cruft's brigade to reinforce the Union right.<sup>27</sup>

When he was conversing with Rawlins, Wallace sighted a number of stragglers approaching. These panic-stricken individuals came dashing up the "half-defined road" which crossed Indian Creek valley. Wallace recalled that he and Rawlins, "scarcely noticed the fugitives, so much more were we drawn by the noise behind them. *That* grew in volume, being a compound of shouts and yells, mixed with the rattle of wheels and the rataplan and throbbing rumble of hoofs in undertone."<sup>28</sup>

Rawlins in a very agitated frame of mind inquired, "What can that be?"

Wallace replied, "It beats me. But I'll find out." Spotting an orderly, Wallace shouted, "Ride and see what all that flurry means." As a suspicion of the truth suddenly struck home, Wallace bade the aide not to spare his horse. Applying his spurs to his mount, the orderly quickly disappeared from view.<sup>29</sup>

Rawlins and Wallace sat astride their horses anxiously waiting for the aide to return. Suddenly, a wild-eyed, bare-headed officer mounted on a sweat-flaked horse, came pounding up the road. As the frightened officer thundered past, he shouted, "We're cut to pieces."

<sup>26</sup> *Source Book*, 978-980; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 243, 249. On moving off in column of companies, Cruft's brigade marched with the 25th Kentucky in advance, followed by the 31st Indiana, the 17th Kentucky, and the 44th Indiana.

<sup>27</sup> *Source Book*, 978; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 237, 252.

<sup>28</sup> *Source Book*, 978-979.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 979.

Wallace subsequently recalled that he "had never seen a case of panic so perfectly defined, and it was curious even impressive." The volatile Rawlins was not disposed to take a philosophical view of the situation. Jerking his revolver from its holster, the captain would have shot "the frantic wretch," had Wallace not caught his hand. Rawlins remonstrated with Wallace. The officers' discussion was quickly terminated, when the orderly came galloping up with an ominous look on his face.<sup>30</sup>

"What is it!" Wallace bellowed.

The aide excitedly replied, "The road back there is jammed with wagons, and men afoot and on horseback, all coming toward us. On the plains we would call it a stampede."

Rawlins and Wallace looked at each other and there was no need for any additional questions. McClelland's division was in full retreat.

Rawlins immediately inquired, "What are you going to do?"

Wallace replied, "There's but one thing I can do."

"What is that?" asked Rawlins.

"Get this brigade [Thayer's] out of the way," Wallace shouted, "If those fellows strike my people, they will communicate the panic." In reply, Rawlins wanted to know where Wallace proposed to send Thayer's troops.

Pointing to the west, Wallace remarked, "To take that way is to retreat, and carry the panic to General Smith; so I'll go right up this road toward the enemy."

His question answered, Rawlins prepared to return to headquarters. When he started for the rear, Rawlins held his horse to a walk, so as not to alarm the men whom he passed.<sup>31</sup>

Even before Rawlins had disappeared from view, Wallace ordered the drummers to beat the "long roll." The regimental commanders quickly formed their units. Lieutenant Peter Wood was alerted to have his six gun battery (Battery A, 1st Illinois Light Artillery) accompany Thayer's brigade. By 10 a.m. the officers had assembled their men. Wallace ordered Thayer to move by the right flank and support McClelland's troops. Thayer barked out the command, "By the right flank, file left." Thayer's brigade moved out in column of companies.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 237.

<sup>31</sup> *Source Book*, 979-980.

The sight of Thayer's resolute troops caused Wallace's spirits to soar. Rising to the occasion, the general barked out the command, "right shoulder shift, double-quick" time march.<sup>32</sup>

A short time before Wallace decided to commit Thayer, three additional regiments had reinforced Thayer's command. These units—the 46th, 57th, and 58th Illinois—had been transported to the Fort Donelson area on the same convoy as Thayer's and Cruft's brigades. Disembarking at the landing four miles below the Water Batteries, the Illinoisians had marched to the Hickman Creek staging area on the 14th. Here the regimental commanders received orders attaching their units to Thayer's brigade. On the following morning, the three regiments moved to the front, where they reported to Colonel Thayer.<sup>33</sup>

Wallace paused for a few moments following Thayer's departure, to try to rally the "sunshine soldiers" from McClernand's division. Unable to accomplish much, Wallace, accompanied by his staff, prepared to ride toward the gathering storm. Just as he was preparing to leave the ridge, Wallace remembered Cruft's skirmishers. An aide was detached with instructions to assemble these men and hurry them to the division's support.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to Wallace's division, one of General C. F. Smith's three brigades was sent from the Union left to bolster McClernand's hard-pressed division. The brigade commanded by Colonel M. L. Smith was held in reserve by General Smith on the morning of the 15th. When Major Brayman returned with the news that General Wallace was unable to send help, McClernand called for Captain George P. Edgar. McClernand directed Edgar to hasten to General Smith's headquarters with a request for reinforcements. Smith, like Wallace, in the face of Grant's instructions to hold his position, declined to rush any troops to McClernand's support. It was indeed fortunate for the Union that Wallace finally decided to reinforce McClernand. Otherwise the battle would have probably been lost, while the Federal officers wasted valuable time

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 980; O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 237, 252.

<sup>33</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 252; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois*, III, 405; IV, 66, 107.

<sup>34</sup> *Source Book*, 980.

waiting for Grant to return from his conference with Flag Officer Foote.<sup>35</sup>

By the time Grant returned to his GHQ, it was past 11 a.m. Following a brief conference with his staff, the general started for the point of danger. Passing Smith's division, Grant issued orders for the general to send M. L. Smith's brigade to stiffen the Union right. Quickly falling in, Morgan L. Smith's troops moved off at a rapid pace.

\* \* \*

At dawn, Lauman's and Cook's troops, who had spent the night camped in the hollows behind the main line of resistance established by C. F. Smith, returned to the front. The various units occupied approximately the same ground on the ridge facing the Confederate rifle pits, as they had on the previous afternoon. General Smith's left flank brigade—Lauman's—was deployed from left to right: the 2d Iowa, the 25th Indiana, the 7th and 14th Iowa, and the 14th Missouri.<sup>36</sup> Colonel Cook, whose brigade formed the division's right, placed four of his regiments in line. These units were posted from left to right: the 12th Iowa, the 50th Illinois, the 13th Missouri, and the 52d Indiana. Cook's fifth regiment, the 7th Illinois, supported Battery D, 1st Missouri Light Artillery.<sup>37</sup>

Under the cover of darkness, Captain Henry Richardson's cannoneers shifted two of their Parrott rifles. These guns were moved into position on the ridge, near where Captain Edward McAllister's artillerists of Battery D, 1st Illinois Light Artillery had emplaced their 24-pounder howitzers on the 13th. A slight earthwork was thrown up for the protection of the guns. At the time the Missourians emplaced their two Parrotts, the ridge was still occupied by Lew Wallace's troops. Accordingly, the 7th Illinois had remained where it was, af-

<sup>35</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 177.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-229, 231-232. The 7th Iowa Infantry was organized and mustered into Federal service at Burlington, Iowa, by Lieutenant Alexander Chambers. By August 2, all the soldiers of the 7th Iowa had been mustered in. Like most of the Iowa regiments raised at this stage of the conflict, the 7th Iowa did not spend much time in a camp of instruction. On August 6, just four days after the last company had been sworn in, the regiment was embarked on the steamer *Jennie Whipple*. Two days later, the Iowans landed at St. Louis. There, they were marched to the government arsenal, where the men drew their weapons. The two flanking companies were armed with Springfield rifles; the other eight companies were issued muskets which had been rifled.

After a short stay at Jefferson Barracks, the 7th Iowa was sent to



fording infantry protection to Richardson's other section. These two pieces were emplaced about 400 yards southwest of the advanced section.<sup>38</sup> The other battery from the 1st Missouri Light Artillery (K), which was operating with Smith's division, continued to be held in reserve, near the Ridge road.<sup>39</sup>

Once they had been relieved, the detachments which had manned the line of outposts during the cold and snowy night were allowed to go to the rear for a short break. Reaching their regimental bivouacs, these troops were permitted to eat, dry their clothes, and get a few minutes rest before returning to the front.<sup>40</sup>

---

Pilot Knob, Missouri, from where they were transferred to Ironton. At Ironton, where they remained for two weeks, the Hawkeyes had their "first opportunity to learn the manual of arms, and . . . [were] instructed in some of the simpler movements of the company, battalion and regimental drill."

The Federal authorities used the Iowans to occupy Jackson and Cape Girardeau. From Cape Girardeau, the 7th Iowa was shifted to the Cairo area. On November 7, the Iowans received their baptism under fire at the battle of Belmont. In this engagement, the regiment suffered terribly. One-half of the Iowans engaged were listed as casualties.

Following the battle, the regiment was sent to Benton Barracks, near St. Louis. At Benton Barracks, the unit "enjoyed a brief season of rest, and partly made up for its losses by recruiting." On January 13, the Iowans boarded the steamer *Continental*. The weather was so cold and the river so full of ice that the transport was soon ice bound. As soon as the ice became solid enough to support the soldiers, they abandoned the stranded vessel and returned to St. Louis. Ferried across the Mississippi, the regiment proceeded to Cairo by rail. At Cairo, the 7th Iowa joined Grant's expedition against Forts Henry and Donelson. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, I, 911-914.

Seven companies of the 14th Iowa—D to K inclusive—were ordered into quarters at Davenport, Iowa, on dates ranging from September 23 to October 30, 1861. These seven companies were mustered into service during the first week of November. On November 28 and 29, the regiment left Davenport by boat for St. Louis.

Disembarking at St. Louis, the Iowans were marched to Benton Barracks, where in the following weeks the troops were put through the paces and hardened up preparatory to taking the field. While at Benton Barracks, the regiment attained a high state of efficiency. The soldiers, however, suffered considerably from sickness, an experience which the Iowans had in common with most other Civil War recruits. On February 5, 1862, the regiment marched to the St. Louis wharf and embarked on a steamboat. After a brief stop at Cairo, the transport proceeded to Fort Henry, where the troops disembarked. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, II, 721-722.

<sup>37</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 221, 223-224.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.



Not long after Smith's troops had taken up their battle stations, the sound of heavy firing (artillery and small-arms) became audible. The noise of battle came from the right of the investment line. As the morning progressed, this terrible roar of conflict steadily drew nearer. Smith's bluecoats listened to this noise "with bated breath and clasped muskets waiting orders which would send them to the help of their comrades."<sup>41</sup> The historian of the 7th Illinois, D. Leib Ambrose, vividly recalled the morning's happenings:

It snowed again last night, but this morning the sky is clear; the clouds have disappeared, and the sunlight is seen again on the Cumberland hills. How cheerily does it fall around the weary soldiers. It is indeed a blessing sent from heaven, for Grant and his army. But hark! we hear the rattle of musketry. It comes from the right wing. Soon we learn that . . . [Wallace's], McArthur's, and Oglesby's brigades are engaged. The battle is now raging furiously.<sup>42</sup>

As the soldiers of the 2d Iowa "lounged around," several of the boys amused themselves by cutting down hickory saplings. Private Bell recalled that when George Howell handed an ax to one of his comrades, he remarked, "that is the first tree I ever cut down in my life." He then added, "and it will be the last."

"What do you mean?" inquired one of Howell's friends.

"I will be dead before the sun sets this evening," Howell answered.<sup>43</sup>

By 9 a.m. General Smith learned that Wallace had sent Cruft's brigade to reinforce McClernand. Since this left the section of guns which Richardson's cannoneers had mounted in the advance work without any support, it troubled the general. Simultaneously, General Smith commenced to fret lest the Rebels launch a sortie against his extreme left. The general believed that if such a thrust developed, it would originate in the rifle pits adjacent to the Eddyville road. Actually, there was no danger, though the general did not know it, of any counterattack in this sector. At this time, only one Confederate regiment—the 30th Tennessee—faced Smith's pow-

<sup>41</sup> Reed, *Campaigns and Battles of the 12th Iowa*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> *Source Book*, 1008.

<sup>43</sup> Bell, *Tramps & Triumphs*, 9.

erful division. To guard against these fancied dangers, Smith directed Colonel Cook to support the Missourians' Parrotts with one regiment, while he detailed a second to cover Lauman's left. The 13th Missouri drew the assignment of protecting the guns; the 52d Indiana the task of bolstering Lauman's left flank. The departure of these two organizations left Cook with only two regiments immediately available—the 50th Illinois and the 12th Iowa.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, the gunners of Battery K had committed one of their sections. Moving forward, the Missourians emplaced two of their Parrott rifles on the nose of the ridge, a short distance to the right of Battery D's advance section. From this position, the cannoneers went into action. Firing across Indian Creek valley, the artillerists hammered away at Pillow's attacking Confederate legions. In spite of the extreme range (one and one-fourth miles), the Union gunners were impressed with the effectiveness of their fire. Reaching the ridge, the infantrymen of the 13th Missouri supported both sections of artillery.<sup>45</sup>

Shortly after the men of the 13th Missouri had taken position covering the four guns, Grant rode up. At this time, the general was en route to the Union right. Observing that the soldiers were wearing knapsacks and blanket rolls, the general, believing the packs would impede the men's movements, directed the troops to drop them on the ground.<sup>46</sup>

The 14th Missouri, which was composed of picked marksmen, was thrown forward to cover General Smith's main line of resistance. One battalion of the regiment operated in front of Lauman's brigade; the other was posted in Cook's sector. Picked companies from Lauman's and Cook's brigades were sent to reinforce the 14th Missouri on the skirmish line. Taking position at the bottom of the ravine near the edge of the abatis, the Union sharpshooters blazed away, whenever an unwary Confederate exposed himself beyond the protected confines of the rifle pits. Until noon the greyclads endeavored to answer the Yankees' fire. Besides being silhouetted against the skyline when they sought to reply to the blueclad snipers,

<sup>44</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 221.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 224, 226; O. R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 13.

<sup>46</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 224.

Colonel Head's Tennesseans were plagued by inferior arms. Therefore, the butternuts finally tired of the one-sided contest and all but ceased firing.<sup>47</sup>

\* \* \*

By the time, Grant reached the Wynn's Ferry road, Thayer's brigade had stemmed the Confederate onslaught. There was a lull in the battle. The cannonading had ceased: everybody was asking, "What next?" When he rode up, Grant recalled, he found many of McClernand's troops clustered together discussing the situation in a "most excited manner." Many of the officers, appearing to have lost control of the situation, had ceased to provide any leadership. The soldiers had their arms, but no ammunition, while there were "tons of it close at hand."<sup>48</sup>

When Grant galloped onto the scene, McClernand and Lew Wallace were conversing with one another. Wallace remembered that Grant clutched in his hands some papers which looked like telegrams. Giving the appearance of a man without any worries, Grant "saluted and received the salutations of his subordinates." Proceeding to the business at hand, Grant directed McClernand and Wallace "to retire their commands to the heights out of cannon range, and throw up works." Continuing, Grant announced that "re-enforcements were *en route*, and it was advisable to await their coming." The two division commanders told Grant "of the mishap to the First Division, and that the road to Charlotte was open to the foe."<sup>49</sup>

But by this time, Grant had begun to take cognizance of the remarks made by some of the troops, in regard to the Rebels having moved to the attack "with knapsacks and haversacks filled with rations." The soldiers expressed the opinion "this indicated a determination on . . . [the foe's] part to stay out and fight just as long as the provisions held out." Turning to his chief of staff, Colonel Joseph D. Webster, Grant remarked, "Some of our men are pretty badly demoralized; but the enemy must be more so, for he has attempted to force his way out, but has fallen back; the one who attacks first now will be

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 221, 223, 377; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, I, 252.

<sup>49</sup> Wallace, "The Capture of Fort Donelson," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 421-422.

victorious and the enemy will have to be in a hurry if he gets ahead of me."

Wallace recalled, "With a sudden grip . . . [Grant] crushed the papers in his hand." In this instant all signs of disappointment or hesitation vanished. In his usual quiet way Grant addressed McClernand and Wallace, "Gentlemen, the position on the right must be retaken." With that he wheeled his horse about and galloped off.<sup>50</sup>

While McClernand and Wallace attacked the Confederate left, General Grant proposed to hurl General Smith's division against the Confederate right. Grant now saw through the Southerners' plan. Undoubtedly, he reasoned, the butternuts had thrown their entire force, except for a few pickets, against McClernand. If Smith were able to assault before the Rebel brass could redeploy their troops, Grant reasoned, the Yankees would encounter little opposition, "except from the intervening abatis." As he headed toward Smith's command post, Grant directed Colonel Webster to ride with him and call out to the men as they passed, "Fill your cartridge-boxes quick, and get into line; the enemy is trying to escape, and he must not be permitted to do so." According to Grant, "This acted like a charm the men only wanted someone to give them a command."<sup>51</sup>

\* \* \*

It was a little before 2 p.m. when Grant reached General Smith's command post. At the time the general accompanied by his staff rode up, General Smith and his chief of staff, Captain Thomas J. Newsham, were sitting at the base of a large tree on the ridge facing the Confederate perimeter.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 422; Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, I, 252. Wallace believed, probably correctly, that Grant's decision to seize the initiative was the most important one the general was ever called upon to make. In his article in *Battles and Leaders*, Wallace wrote:

In every great man's career there is a crisis exactly similar to that which now overtook General Grant, and it cannot be better described than as a crucial test of his nature. A mediocre person would have accepted the news as an argument for persistence in his resolution to enter upon a siege. Had General Grant done so, it is very probable his history would have been then and there concluded. His admirers and detractors are alike invited to study him at this precise juncture. It cannot be doubted that he saw with painful distinctness the effect of the disaster to his right wing. Wallace, "The Capture of Fort Donelson," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 422.

<sup>51</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, I, 252.

Hailing Smith, Grant remarked, "General Smith, all has failed on our right—You must take Fort Donelson."

Smith sprang to his feet and brushing his moustache with his right hand said, "I will do it."

While Grant was briefing him on the tactical situation, Smith sent Captain Newsham to alert the brigade and regimental commanders. After Grant had directed Smith to charge the Confederate works to his immediate front with Cook's and Lauman's brigade, he advised his subordinate, "he would find nothing but a very thin line to contend with."<sup>52</sup>

Artillery would be used to soften up the Confederates' position preparatory to Smith's attack. Smith issued instructions for Batteries D and K, 1st Missouri Light Artillery to start shelling the rifle pits scheduled to be assaulted. Battery D's gunners immediately sent several projectiles screaming into the Rebel works. When they elicited no reply, the Missourians promptly ceased firing. General Grant noticed this. He accordingly directed Captain Richardson to send one of his sections to support the Union right. Without a moment's hesitation, Richardson issued marching orders to his left section whose guns were emplaced farthest from the Southerners' entrenchments.<sup>53</sup>

The cannoneers manning the section of Battery K which had been held in reserve near the Ridge road, quickly wheeled their two Parrotts into position. Unlimbering their pieces on the ridge opposite the greyclads' earthworks, the Missourians began to blast away, employing both shot and shell.<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, General Grant had sent a staff officer to recall the other artillery unit organic to Smith's division—Battery H, 1st Missouri Light Artillery. This battery had been sent to

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-253; *Source Book*, 935; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 8.

The Missouri *Democrat's* correspondent informed his readers:

General Smith is emphatically a fighting man, and as may be imagined, the events of the morning had tended to decrease in no measure his pugnacity. When he received his long-desired orders for an assault of the enemy's works, his eyes glistened with a fire which, could it have been seen by his maligners would have left them in no doubt as to his private feeling in regard to the present contest. *Source Book*, 773.

<sup>53</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 8; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 225. The section sent to support the counterthrust against the Confederate left, returned late on the afternoon of the 15th without being engaged.

<sup>54</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 13; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VII, 226.



reinforce McClermand's division on the previous day. When the Confederates launched their powerful onslaught, the battery had been forced to retire. At the time Grant's aide arrived on the Wynn's Ferry, the battery was unemployed. Following the receipt of Grant's instructions to move to Smith's support, Captain Frederick Welker mustered his cannoneers and started for the Union left with three of his pieces.<sup>55</sup>

Long before the gunners of Batteries H and K reached his line of departure, Smith had completed his dispositions. The general planned to assault with his left flank brigade—Lauman's. His right brigade—Cook's—would be used to feign an attack on the Confederates' rifle pits. If all went according to schedule, Cook's feint would keep the greyclads pinned down, while Lauman scored a breakthrough.<sup>56</sup>

In accordance with General Smith's instructions, Colonel Cook prepared to strengthen his skirmish line. Strong detachments from the 50th Illinois and the 12th Iowa moved down off the ridge. Working their way cautiously forward, these men reached the edge of the timber, fronting the abatis. Here, the soldiers joined their comrades who had been occupying the skirmish line since morning. Taking position the "men went cheerfully to the work assigned them, and kept up a warm fire on the enemy." Covered by Cook's demonstration, Lauman's brigade surged to the attack on the left.

As soon as Colonel Cook learned that the guns which the 7th Illinois had been supporting had been ordered to the right, he sent a messenger with instructions for Lieutenant Colonel Andrew J. Babcock to move his regiment to the front. Led by Colonel Babcock, and cheered on by Major Richard Rowett, the Illinoisans moved forward on the double.<sup>57</sup>

When Captain Newsham alerted him to hold his brigade ready to attack, Lauman quickly formed his command. The 2d Iowa was designated to spearhead the assault. When informed of this, Colonel Tuttle gave the order "fall in!" The regiment formed on the double behind the neat rows of stacked rifle-muskets. After giving the command "take arms," Tuttle formed his Iowans into double line of battle, the left

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 8; O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 221, 223.

<sup>57</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 221, 223; *Source Book*, 1008.



battalion (Companies B, C, F, G, and K) in front and the right in support. Colonel Tuttle would lead the advance battalion, while Lieutenant Colonel James Baker headed the other.<sup>58</sup>

The 2d Iowa would be covered on the left by the 52d Indiana and on the right by another Hoosier regiment, the 25th Indiana. Preparatory to taking up the advance, Colonel James C. Veatch of the 25th Indiana deployed and threw forward, as skirmishers, Company B. The 7th and 14th Iowa (the former unit on the left, the latter on the right) were formed on the right of the 25th Indiana. Before the attack jumped off, Lauman redeployed the 14th Missouri. The picked marksmen of this crack regiment were employed as skirmishers. They were given the task of protecting the flanks of Lauman's brigade during the assault. Except for the 2d Iowa and the 14th Missouri, Lauman's units would move to the attack in column by battalions.<sup>59</sup>

Just as Colonel Tuttle finished forming his command, General Smith rode up. Hailing Captain Newsham, who had been assisting Tuttle, the general inquired as to the regiment. Newsham replied, "The 2d Iowa." General Smith turned to the Hawkeyes and said, "Second Iowa, you must take the fort—take the caps off your guns—fix bayonets and I will support you." The general took his battle station between the two battalions.<sup>60</sup>

Before leading his grim Iowans down into the ravine, Tuttle spoke a few words. He told his men, "Now, my bully boys, give them cold steel. Do not fire a gun until you have got on the inside, then give them h--!! Forward, my boys! March!"

At this, the regiment moved down off the ridge. According to Sergeant Duckworth, "determination beamed from every eye, was written upon every face."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 228-229, 231-232; O. R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 10; *Source Book*, 935; Bell, *Tramps & Triumphs*, 9; Twombly, *2d Iowa at Fort Donelson*, 15.

<sup>59</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VII, 228-229, 231-232; O. R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. I, 10; *Source Book*, 935.

<sup>60</sup> *Source Book*, 935, 971.

<sup>61</sup> Twombly, *2d Iowa at Fort Donelson*, 15-16.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.